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ABSTRACT

Adult and continuing education are based on the assumptions that individuals control their lives; lifelong education is an essential component of adults' lives; and the enhancement of adult education resides with adult educators who provide leadership, design policy, translate policy into action, develop learning opportunities for adults, and evaluate programs. Counselors of adults should consider themselves as educators of adults in the context of lifelong learning and identify with the field of adult education. Counselors should be aware that in adult and continuing education, learning is a self-directed process. As adult educators, counselors may function in a variety of settings, e.g., business and industry, government agencies, and labor organizations and unions. To be effective as adult educators, counselors must understand the objectives of the programs they serve, and identify their special roles and tasks. The counselor has a positive, crucial, and sensitive function in mediating between the learner and the resources that are available. In their striving to counsel adults to be more effective learners, counselors must also, as self-directed learners, continue their own professional development. (MCF)

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COUNSELORS IN ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

CONFERENCE ON

INFORMATION, GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES AND THE SELECTION OF APPROPRIATE AND EFFICIENT INFORMATION SUPPORTS AND RESOURCES FOR ADULT EDUCATION

by

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Adult and continuing education is based on assumptions such as the following: 1) freedom, truth and justice reside in the people; 2) the people must have the capability and opportunity to make final decisions which control their individual lives and their collective well-being; 3) the education of adults in the context of lifelong education is an essential component of the life of both the individual and society; and, finally, 4) the enhancement of adult education resides in large part with the educators of adults.

Educators of adults provide leadership to enhance the field; design policy; translate the policy into action; develop learning opportunities for adults; and evaluate the enterprise. Underlying this paper and more explicit in it, is an assumption of and commitment to the concept that educators of adults in all countries can and should learn from each other. Each one can make a contribution, albeit different in degree and type, to each other. (See Charters, Ref. #2.)

Counselors of adults should consider themselves as educators of adults in the context of lifelong learning. This paper addresses several topics which are important for counselors of adults to understand in order to perform their roles and tasks in this context.

The topics are: the definition and description of adult education; learning as a self-directed process; the identification with the field of adult education by counselors; function of counselors in agencies; the statement of program objectives; the roles and tasks of counselors; counselors as brokers; the qualifications of counselors; counselors as a resource for information; the need for continuing professional development of counselors. (See Bertelsen, Ref. #1, and Dosa, Ref. #4.)

DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF ADULT EDUCATION

In addition to understanding the propositions and assumptions of the field, it is necessary for counselors to have a definition or description of adult education as a basis for operating. A current definition follows.

Adult education is the identification, selection, provision, arrangement, and evaluation of learning activities for persons with certain characteristics. They must be physically mature and consciously learning in order to achieve their selected goals. They must be learning as part of their life pattern, on a part-time basis or learning on a full-time basis for only short periods of time. They are also learning in order to assume fuller responsibilities as a citizen, worker, family person, and social being living in and with concern for the physical environment.

Adult education is that part of lifelong education which takes place during adulthood. Lifelong education spans the period from birth to death but in many cases the term is used synonomously for adult education. Currently in the field other terms may be used synonomously for adult education. They include: recurrent, extension, distance, continuing and extra mural education. It is realized that persons engaged in the education of adults may use a variety of other terms. In some cases the same words are used but mean different things, and in other cases different words are used that mean the same things.

Adult education is a comprehensive term that includes a wide range of behavior, subjects, sponsors, methods and resources. a) The behaviors to be acquired and developed include: the acquisition of skills, the knowledge and ability to think, the development of interests and attitudes,

the appreciation of and ability to clarify and set values. b) The subject-matter or content of adult education ranges over all aspects of life and include: vocational, professional, familial, societal, recreational, and educational. c) The sponsors include many agencies and vocational and professional groups which offer alternative learning opportunities for groups and individuals. d) The methods, formats and techniques are also varied and include television, radio, tapes and cassettes, classes, seminars, discussions, workshops, conferences, lectures and programmed instruction. In addition an increasing amount and range of print and nonprint materials are available.

Adulthood itself needs to be recognized as including many stages or periods ranging from early adulthood to old age. These five or more decades which consist of multiple generations may create inter-generational gaps. Adulthood thus requires continuous learning to cope with changing individual needs relating to health, career, family, recreation and citizenship. All of these are subject to changes in society, technology, government, and the physical environment and are included in adult education.

LEARNING AS A SELF-DIRECTED PROCESS

Counselors should be aware that within the field of adult and continuing education it is generally accepted that learning is a self-directed process.

Learning is a self-directed process that takes place when the adult interacts with an educational situation. Counselors should understand that adult education agencies only create or develop activities, and a climate to which they hope adults will react and thus learn. A learner who has an objective in mind, encounters the learning opportunities which

are accessible. If the learner, the activity and the learning environment are compatible, an interaction may take place. If so, the learner may change and thus learning has taken place.

Because each individual brings a unique background and objective to a learning opportunity each one may approach it differently. They may choose to select, modify or disregard the activity. Thus learning is unique, individualistic and self-directed.

Self-directedness means that adults control their learning and through this process control their lives. It does not mean that learning is independent of other people and situations but rather that learners select the situations and activities for their learning.

In a literate society it is not cost beneficial to provide one to one and small group instruction as the only technique of instruction except in special circumstances. However, mass media and electronic devices such as micro-computers are becoming widespread in some parts of the world and with appropriate software are making individualized instruction possible on a large scale.

Learners should accept responsibility for their own learning and should become increasingly self-directed. Considering the millions of adults who should be learning, the necessity for self-directedness seems obvious. However, many adults need some initial assistance to learn how to become self-directed in their pursuit of learning. Counsellors must be sensitive to the delicate balance between self- and other-directedness.

It may appear to some people that the responsibility for learning rests with the adult education agency which produces and makes accessible the activities which are in effect opportunities for adults to learn. In the final analysis, however, the responsibility rests with the learners.

Counselors may assist adults to clarify their objectives and put them in writing, but learners themselves must seek out those activities in agencies which are most likely to enable them to achieve their objectives. The self-directed learners must further utilize the resources accessible to them in order to develop skills such as reading, speaking, listening and viewing which are necessary to learning.

IDENTIFICATION BY COUNSELORS WITH THE FIELD OF ADULT EDUCATION

It is a thesis of this paper that counselors of adults should identify with the field of adult education.

Many counselors and other educators of adults clearly identify themselves with the field of adult education. Willingly or unwillingly many other counselors and educators of adults are not so identified, nor do they perceive themselves as such. Included as educators of adults are persons who have a great diversity of roles in adult education such as: organizers, principals, program and other administrators; supervisors; deans; directors; advisors and counselors; librarians, media specialists, public relations (promotion) experts, and other support personnel; consultants; clergy; tutors and teachers; community developers; community educators; research workers; policy makers; elected officials; and board members of adult education agencies. They are located worldwide.

Many of the educators include counselors from another vocation. These persons improve their competencies in adult education through experience and observation as well as by participation in seminars, institutes, conferences and other activities designed for them. They may be paid or serve as volunteers. They are thus participating in their own continuing adult education as well as the education of other adults.

The information and skill that is required to function effectively varies for each of these roles in adult education. Each should know some basics about all areas of adult education but certainly different kinds and amounts of information are required for a minister of education than for a village teacher--for a project director than for an elected official--for a full-time director than for a full or part-time staff member in an agency.

Counselors as other educators of adults should identify with the field of adult education of which they are an integral part.

THE FUNCTION OF COUNSELORS IN AGENCIES

Counselors may function independently but usually they function or work in agencies. In order for counselors to function effectively, the purposes of their agencies and the nature of the adults being served should be identified and considered in their planning and activities.

Some agencies have an adult education component in which counselors may function. It includes: business and industry; communication enterprises; galleries and museums; government agencies; labor organizations and unions; military services; multinational organizations; religious bodies; schools; special groups (gerontology, handicapped, minorities, illiterates); trade, vocational, and professional associations; voluntary (not for profit) organizations; schools; and universities, colleges and other postsecondary institutions.

These agencies of adult education operate at one or more levels--international, regional, national, state, community or village. Agencies are established for many reasons and may coordinate, cooperate, compete or function parallel with each other. In any case their purposes should be identified and considered by counselors as they work with adults.

Often informal networks are developed among the counselors and other educators of adults. These networks provide a person to person relationship for exchanging information and making referrals.

THE STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES OF PROGRAMS

For counselors to function effectively they must understand the objectives of the adult education programs and activities to which they are relating. The objectives must be stated in terms meaningful to sponsors and society but particularly to the participants for which they are designed.

The objectives of adult education may be stated in lofty and altruistic terms but to be most meaningful they must be focused upon a specific level. The intangible goals and aspirations of adults must be translated to tangible objectives that are realizable for adults in specific day to day situations. For example, what are the purposes of this conference--have the goals or objectives been stated in the conference materials? The participants may learn many things incidentally but the goal is to achieve the stated objectives.

The objectives of the sponsor and the individual should be consistent and agreed upon by all those involved. The objectives of any program however may be viewed differently by the learners and sponsor and may be stated in different ways. For example, UNESCO has a purpose in convening the conference to help the participants to be informed as a regional group, to be better informed about and to be able to use information resources accessible to educators of adults. Likewise, our countries have a reason for our being here, such as to help us to continue our own professional development and perhaps also to promote national and human resource development.

The participants also have objectives, for example, to continue their own professional or career development.

The objectives of one agency may be contradictory to those of another agency. Agencies may also direct their attention to different audiences, according to factors such as literacy and educational background; career or work expectation; family situation; citizenship role; music or cultural interest; and recreational interest.

It is well to remember however that it is only the individual who learns. Learning is by adults as individuals and through them the objectives of the sponsor, society, and agencies are achieved. While the objectives may have been based on many needs from many sources, the achievement of the objectives is only through the learner. The objectives that UNESCO, our countries and agencies have for this conference can only be achieved if the participants learn the necessary behaviors and content that result in the achievement of these objectives.

ROLES AND TASKS OF COUNSELORS

Counselors of adults have special roles and tasks which they should identify. Counselors may function in relation to different life goals. They may be concerned with health, personal affairs, vocations, family, and education. In this paper the concern is with the counseling role in the education for adults but there may be overlapping relationships and inter-relationships among the categories. It seems advisable, however, for counselors of adults to recognize their qualifications and to restrict their activities to the educational component. They are not personal, psychiatric, political or other counselors. Although related to these roles they are educational counselors with a strong concern for the human interaction between counselor and client as a whole human being.

People working with adults are identified in many other roles but are often not identified as counselors. Also sometimes the counselor role may be a secondary one for people holding other positions. These roles include: teachers; on-the-job personnel in business and military organizations; staff of adult education agencies; independent for-profit advisors and consultants; clergy; peers; consultants--often for special populations, e.g., families; and brokers who are client-centered and operate independently of other adult education agencies.

These are tasks of counseling and guidance services in respect to information: The overall function of a counselor is to facilitate access by learners to relevant information in order to achieve their objectives. Specifically some tasks are:

1. To assist adults in identifying and assessing their needs
2. To assist adults in stating their objectives based on their needs
3. To assist adults in obtaining information about learning opportunities
4. To assist adults in evaluating learning opportunities in relation to their objectives
5. To assist adults in evaluating their achievement
6. To assist adults in becoming more self-directed in the above mentioned tasks
7. To provide feed-back from learners to program planners and in this way make learning opportunities more meaningful

While the roles and tasks of counselors are clearly identifiable, counseling may take place in informal settings.

The selection of resources by adults requires knowledge, skill and judgment. The following three criteria may be used to assist the learner to select resources and assist the counselor to help the learner. They include:

1. Accessibility of resources including: time; place; schedule; equipment; listening and viewing range and media.
2. Ability of learners to use resources including: reading level; skill in use of equipment; skill in using media.
3. Cost to learners including: tuition and fees; books and materials; transportation fare; baby-sitting; and meals.

COUNSELORS AS BROKERS

The counselor is a broker or gatekeeper between information and the learner. A function of a broker or gatekeeper is to assist the learner to efficiently and effectively obtain access to information and to analyse it. It is important then that the counselor be fully informed about the type, extent, accessibility and fees of educational activities as well as the limitations of each one. In any situation the mass of information that is available may be overwhelming especially to a new learner. In these cases the gatekeeper or broker becomes a filter. This function is important and involves evaluation of information of which only a part will be made available to the learner. It means that the counselor must have a clear understanding of learners and be sensitive to their needs in order to provide the appropriate information or provide reference to it.

The counselor has a positive, crucial and sensitive function in mediating between the learner and the resources that are accessible.

To mediate it must be clear to the learners that the counselor is their advocate. The counselor is also an advocate for learners by providing feedback about the effectiveness of learning opportunities to the providers of the learning opportunities. In some cases the counselor is the only psychological support that is accessible to learners.

It is noted also that the learner depends on the advice given and expects a high quality performance by a counselor. Whether or not the counselor is paid is of little interest to the learner.

QUALIFICATIONS OF COUNSELORS

Counselors whether paid or providing volunteer service need to obtain appropriate qualifications and continue to be up-dated in their roles and tasks. A major problem in adult education is that many persons offer advice and assume the role of counselor but have few qualifications. Likewise many persons designated as counselors may also have few qualifications. It suggests that a higher correlation should be developed between the qualifications of counselors and the tasks that they are to perform.

A significant problem is determining how to assist counselors to obtain appropriate qualifications. It may be well for those persons involved in the preparation and continuing education of counselors to write job descriptions or develop a list of competencies. In general, however, counselors need to continue to study their roles and their tasks in order to be effective and current.

Counselors require information, skills and abilities in relation to the topics mentioned above. As learners they should further develop their professional competence through the many learning opportunities accessible to them. They may also learn from the counseling experiences

that they share with the adult learners with whom they meet.

COUNSELORS AS A RESOURCE FOR INFORMATION

Learners require information about learning opportunities and acquire it from a variety of sources. In this acquisition of information by adults counselors are both a source of information and a referral agent for information. The learner and counselor acquire information from various sources such as: advertising, correspondence/mailings, sound trucks, telephone, speeches, drama, posters, films, film strips, radio, television, cable television, newsletters and referral agencies. Sources may be available through mass media, through special groups, or through face-to-face contact.

Counselors can help learners to weave their way through the mass of information that is available to them. In some ways the counselor can be an advocate in times of real pressure on the learner. For example, in some places adult education has come to the attention of major advertising firms. Coupons and tickets for adult education activities are being given free or at discount prices by supermarkets, chain stores and other entrepreneurs as an addition to purchases. Some universities, proprietary concerns and other adult education agencies are accepting credit cards for payment of tuition and fees. Some adult education agencies place contracts with promotion and public relations firms to present their education products, wares or products to the potential clients.

Adult education agencies are in general competing for the time and money of adults who are their potential customers. Adult education agencies must get the attention of adults just as cinemas, concerts, sports, recreation, mass media and other agencies do. Adult education has to enter the marketplace and compete by the use of appropriate information

and media. Learners and particularly beginning learners are often perceived in a passive state and accordingly must be introduced to new learning opportunities and indeed must be persuaded to become active learners. Alternative methods, often new, to adults must be used to encourage them to participate in learning opportunities which are not part of their tradition and may be in informal situations.

A particular concern for the adult is the professionalism or objectivity of the counselor. Some questions might be asked about the information. Is it accurate? Is it complete? Is it biased toward a particular agency or sponsor? The counselor must always maintain a professional role in answering such questions.

NEED OF COUNSELORS FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Continuing professional development is a necessity for counselors as well as other educators of adults. Counselors and other educators of adults have the same problems of continuing their own professional development as other adults and need access to information, services and sources. Some of them have had training or education in adult and continuing education prior to entry into the field and some of them have had little qualification for this field before entry. Whatever the extent of pre-entry preparation and the extent of experience, it is necessary for them as self directed learners to continue their professional development. The reasons for continuing education are the same as that for any other adult. These reasons include the fact that there are changes in adult education, in the needs of adults and in technological and other aspects of society. If educators of adults do not continue their own professional development there is wastage of this human resource. But there is double wastage because the adults with whom they associate

are not receiving the best learning opportunities that could be provided for them. (See Charters, Ref. #3.)

Essential to professional development is a plan or program. This plan may be for varying periods of time such as: total career; a year; or an activity. It is important that there be a continuous and continuing activity pervading all aspects of the professional life of counselors.

Counselors as educators of adults should identify and study their unique roles and tasks in the education of adults. They should see these roles and tasks in relation to several significant topics of lifelong education and learning. In their striving to counsel adults to be more effective learners, they should also as self directed learners continue their own professional development.

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